

NOVEMBER 14, 1985

Our luck continues to be good in the Shortgrass Country. We've just the right amount of frost to curtail grass production. Summer thunder showers and big fall rains were about to cause a turf that was going to cover up all the landmarks. Had frost held off a few more weeks, stock like our light lambs couldn't have found the waterings.

About every 60 or 70 years we have abundant growing seasons. Before World War I, my grandfather cut and stacked prairie hay from his pastures. The hay outlasted its need as the stems cured out too coarse for cattle to eat it. So after my Uncle Goat Whiskers got that tired of having a dead stack lot and burned what was left of the hay.

With the stack gone, the lot made a good working area. Parched dust and black ashes, mixed in with a feathery soot of unburned grass, created a perfect sun screen for light skinned cowboys. And as an added advantage, the few range hogs that Uncle Whiskers kept for his winter meat had a ready made spot to wallow and keep down the lice and ticks that were such a problem before D.D.T and chlordane were discovered.

I remember one dry fall when I was over there helping Whiskers ship his lamb and calves. I pointed out how fortunate he was, the way the cover of ashes was sifting over into his crowd pens and cutting chute. The dry weather had kicked off a big siege of pinkeye in cattle in that fall. From the way Whiskers and his cowboys were all blacked up underneath their hat brims and eyes, I suggested that instead of turning his old cows out in the pasture to go blind from pinkeye, we could just hold them around the ranch and let all that blacktopping he had in his corrals form a natural shade for their eyes.

Whiskers always was easy to upset when he was working and I don't recall if he ever answered me. Later on, experiment stations began keeping pinkeye cows in dark barns for treatment. It's sure not my fault that my uncle passed up a chance of being a pioneer in the pinkeye field.

To this day, I still like to watch cattle worked in those corrals. Goat Whiskers the Younger can get up enough momentum chousing his cattle that the billowing dust looks exactly like black smoke rising off a herd that's caught on fire.

Sure, I long for the old days. But I guess most of all I'd like to see grass high enough to cut with a mower even if it has to be burned in the end.